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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [WA](#)  
SUBJECT: SIZING UP THE RDP

REF: A. REF A: WINDHOEK 394  
[1](#)B. REF B: WINDHOEK 0035

Classified By: Ambassador Dennise Mathieu per 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) celebrated its first birthday in November. The party may be new to Namibian politics, but its players are not. Led by former SWAPO stalwarts and well-known personalities elected at the party's December 5 congress, the RDP seems poised to give the Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) some competition in next year's general and presidential elections. However, it is not yet clear whether the party stands for real political and economic change. End Summary.

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RDP Heads to Court  
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[1](#)2. (U) Two weeks after the events in Outapi (ref A), the RDP was again in the national spotlight when on December 4, hours before the opening of its first party congress at the Windhoek College of Education (WCE), officials from the Ministry of Education informed the RDP that the venue was no longer available. The party claimed it had already paid for the conference hall and that 500 delegates from around Namibia were on their way to Windhoek. No reason was given for the cancellation, but the RDP did not hesitate to publicize its suspicions. "It is another testimony to SWAPO's thuggish methods to stifle democracy in this country, and this comes just after the recent incident in Outapi," the RDP said in a press release.

[1](#)3. (U) On December 5, the RDP took its complaint to the High Court, where the rector of the WCE insisted that the Ministry of Education forbade the use of the WCE by political parties. The RDP's attorney refuted this statement, pointing out that the SWAPO Youth League had held meetings at the WCE. The Ministry also argued that it had never seen or approved the RDP's application to host its event, but the RDP provided a letter from the WCE that stated its application had been approved. Acting Judge Johan Swanepol decided in the RDP's favor, ordering the WCE to comply with the rental agreement and the Ministry of Education to cover the RDP's legal expenses for the last-minute trial.

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Hamutenya Elected RDP President  
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[1](#)4. (SBU) Hours later under notable police presence, the RDP convoked its congress at the WCE. Chanting "RDP, Vive!" and the party's new slogan "We can do better," the delegates celebrated the legal victory and praised the RDP members who had confronted SWAPO in Outapi. Flanked by body guards, former Foreign Minister Hidipo Hamutenya gave the opening ceremony's keynote address. (Note: President Nujoma sacked Hamutenya in 2004 after he ran for the presidency of SWAPO. End Note) In it, he took numerous shots at SWAPO, making fun of the ruling party's claim that its members had been provoked in Outapi and during the Tobias Hainyeko campaign (ref B) and boasting that SWAPO fears the growing popularity of the RDP. "SWAPO is literally panicking and behaving like a wounded lion," Hamutenya claimed. On the policy side, he criticized President Pohamba for failing to address corruption and regional development, and he laid out the

RDP's platform in broad strokes. He promised the party would improve the education system, create jobs, expand the economy, rehabilitate public services, and provide better health care. Hamutenya also chided himself and RDP members for allowing Namibia to come under "one-party rule."

15. (U) In addition to fleshing out its manifesto and campaign strategies in closed sessions during the rest of the congress, the party also elected new leadership. Hamutenya was chosen as party president; Steve Bezuidenhout, a former SWAPO member from Keetmanshoop, was elected vice president, and Jesaya Nyamu, former Minister of Trade and Industry and former Minister of Mines and Energy, was named secretary general.

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An Alliance in the Works?  
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16. (C) In a conversation with Poloff, RDP organizers Libolly Haufiku and Norah Appolus predicted that the RDP was on the verge of coming of age and becoming a political force with which to be reckoned. Unlike the other opposition parties, Appolus remarked, the RDP had representation and functioning offices in all 13 districts around the country. Haufiku claimed the party's strength came from its familiarity with SWAPO and thus an ability to hone in on its shortcomings. He accused SWAPO's leadership of being autocratic and paranoid. In addition to allowing conditions in Namibia to decline, SWAPO's tendency to spy on its leadership was costing it prominent members, Haufiku theorized. "Nujoma started Mugabe-like undemocratic behavior. The moment you question (the party), you are ostracized and left out of invitations." Haufiku could not estimate the number of RDP members, saying that its database of 180,000 members was deceptive, since "many of them are underground," but he is convinced the party is gaining significant ground, especially with the youth. Haufiku and Appolus also outlined RDP's main tasks over the next year: expanding its membership, addressing political violence, and most difficult-- raising enough funds to effectively compete in the elections. They reiterated Hamutenya's party platform, but did not offer details.

17. (C) In a separate conversation, Member of Parliament and leader of the opposition Republican Party (RP) Henk Mudge echoed the RDP's financial concern to Poloff on December 8. Mudge, who sat in the front row of the RDP congress, confided that he has been talking to his friend Hamutenya about the possibility of forming not a coalition, but an alliance. Mudge said he has also broached the subject with the leadership of a tiny Caprivian political party as well as with senior members-- although not necessarily the leaders of-- several other opposition parties. Mudge is confident that the RDP will unseat SWAPO's two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, but said that an alliance backed by significant funding was necessary to take the victory to another level, namely for Hamutenya to be elected Namibia's next president. Mudge estimated the RP and RDP would each need to raise \$700,000 (U.S.) and requested assistance in establishing contacts in the U.S. private sector. Poloff explained that the USG could not offer such assistance.

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Commentary  
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18. (C) The RDP may be riding high on its recent legal victory and its well publicized show-down in Outapi, but the party faces a steep uphill battle as it challenges the well-oiled SWAPO political machine. The RDP is unlikely to garner the financial resources it needs to match SWAPO's war chest, and the majority of Namibians, particularly those outside urban centers, still feel strong loyalty to their liberation party, SWAPO. Nevertheless, the RDP seems to have made in-roads in attracting new members, particularly the youth. If allowed to freely organize between now and election day, the RDP will be able to stay in the public eye and interact with regular Namibians around the country. The latter is especially

important if the RDP is to become more familiar and a more comfortable choice for the populace. Moreover, if the RDP benefits from the assistance of other opposition parties, it stands a decent chance of cutting in to SWAPO's majority in the National Assembly. Currently, SWAPO holds 55 of the 72 seats; thus, the RDP and the other opposition parties would need to win seven of those to take away the two-thirds majority. And it may take just such a victory before it is evident whether the RDP represents real political and economic change or whether a party led by SWAPO defectors means more of the same.

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